

## **“I WANT TO GO HOME!” TIPS FOR BATTLING HOMESICKNESS**

The transition from home to university often involves major changes in a person's life – new living spaces, changing friendships, financial pressure, new studies. It can be filled with excitement and adventure. It can also be marked by homesickness, which can often take people by surprise but also make people quite miserable and unsure of themselves.

All of life's relationships navigate a balance of being close and being separate, feeling connected and also having space to be an individual, and moving away from family and home is no exception. It takes time to find a new balance and rhythm in connection with home and in your relationships in a new stage of life.

In our conversations with people struggling to overcome homesickness, we often hear about creative ways people have come up with to manage this transition. One student's ideas are presented below, followed by some other suggestions. If you would like to talk to someone more about this, please make contact with the ANU Counselling.

### **Here's what one first-year student told us:**

- Keep in touch with friends and family via regular phone calls / face-timing / skyping
- If needed, talk to a counsellor – they will listen objectively and be in your corner
- Break up the year into smaller parts by having some short term goals and intentional trips home planned (if possible). Get a year planner or calendar so that you can see and track things like trips home, next holidays, assignment due dates, etc.
- Know your options for changing your study plans in case the situation doesn't improve. This includes HECS / HELP dates and transfer policies.
- Don't worry about wanting to go home for weekends, if home is close enough, even if it is the first weekend since you've been away! Excuses things like bringing laundry home, picking up items you forgot, and going to a birthday party are all good ones.
- Keep yourself busy – check out the gym program, uni website or the different clubs' market days for activities you might like to get involved with.
- Pick a couple of college events to go to – you don't have to go to all of them, but it is helpful to go to some. Sports games and movie nights are good because you generally don't have to make small talk with people but can still participate.
- Establish some kind of routine, especially in the morning, to help get into a rhythm.
- Go to classes face to face, don't just stay in your room and watch online lectures
- Don't pressure yourself into making friends immediately; start with acquaintances so that you don't feel pressure or lock yourself into unwanted friendships.

## Some other ideas:

- Be kind to yourself – moving away is a big step and needs some time to adjust to.
- Feeling lonely is a key factor in feeling homesick – even if you are surrounded by lots of people at college you can still feel lonely. Having planned, intentional contact with friends and family who you know well and who know you well can help this.
- Establishing a regular routine which involves enough sleep, exercise, being outside, eating well and a mixture of social and creative time can help structure your day.
- Observe the times you feel most homesick and notice whether there is a pattern to when it occurs the most – Is it stronger in the evenings? When you're stressed? When there are things going on at home that you can't get to? Noticing a pattern can help you anticipate and then manage times that might be more difficult.
- Observe what homesickness feels like in your body – for some people they might feel a sickness in their stomach, other people might get headaches, or feel really tired or agitated. Noticing the onset of these symptoms will help you act on some of your helping strategies earlier rather than later.
- Does homesickness trigger strong feelings for you? Some people's homesickness manifests in feeling quite low or flat, others get irritable or annoyed more easily, while others get stressed and anxious. Being able to label emotions and connect them to times when you are feeling homesick can help you take control of them.
- Write down or remind yourself of why you made the decision to come to university in the first place – What made this an attractive option? What got you thinking this was the place for you? What were you hopeful about in coming to university?
- Experiment with defining some short term goals (3, 6, 12 months) as well as longer term goals connected to different areas of your life – friendships, study, work, leisure, health and wellbeing. Set up a vision board or something that visually enables you to remember your goals.
- Make an effort to notice better times and write them down in a gratitude journal – For example, when is the homesickness even a little less strong. What is different at those times? What are you doing? Who are you with? What clues does this give you about how you could strengthen or build on the things that are working?
- Be careful about using things like alcohol, drugs or gambling as ways to “drown your sorrows”. Talk to a counsellor or friend if you are concerned about this
- Find people you trust who you can talk to – homesickness is normal and being able to talk about it out aloud with friends or family can help process the transition and others tune in to what your experience is like. You might even find others in similar situations and opening up the conversation might help them too!
- As well as visiting home, have family or other loved ones visit you here so you can show them around and they have a sense of what your life looks like at uni.
- Make your room your own! Create an environment that's comfortable and familiar.